

HIGH CULTURE AS SUBCULTURE: BRISBANE'S CONTEMPORARY CHAMBER MUSIC SCENE

By

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Declaration

The work presented in this dissertation is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original and my own work, except as acknowledged in the text, and the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university. The primary research project on which parts of this dissertation are based was subject to and cleared by a departmental ethical review according to the requirements of the University of Queensland.

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Abstract

The aim of the dissertation is to discover the extent to which methodologies and conceptual frameworks used to understand popular culture may also be useful in the attempt to understand contemporary high culture. The dissertation addresses this question through the application of subculture theory to Brisbane's contemporary chamber music scene, drawing on a detailed case study of the contemporary chamber ensemble Topology and its audiences. The dissertation begins by establishing the logic and necessity of applying cultural studies methodologies to contemporary high culture. This argument is supported by a discussion of the conceptual relationships between cultural studies, high culture, and popular culture, and the methodological consequences of these relationships. In Chapter 2, a brief overview of interdisciplinary approaches to music reveals the central importance of subculture theory, and a detailed survey of the history of cultural studies research into music subcultures follows. Five investigative themes are identified as being crucial to all forms of contemporary subculture theory: the symbolic; the spatial; the social; the temporal; the ideological and political. Chapters 3 and 4 present the findings of the case study as they relate to these five investigative themes of contemporary subculture theory. Chapter 5 synthesises the findings of the previous two chapters, and argues that while participation in contemporary chamber music is not as intense or pervasive as is the case with the most researched street-based youth subcultures, it is nevertheless possible to describe Brisbane's contemporary chamber music scene as a subculture. The dissertation closes by reflecting on the ways in which the subcultural analysis of contemporary chamber music has yielded some insight into the lived practices of high culture in contemporary urban contexts.

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